

January 25, 2007

MINUTES

STAFFORD COUNTY

CABLE TELEVISION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

January 25, 2007
APPROVED

I. Call to Order.

The meeting was called to order by the chair, Jackie Hontz, at 7:12 p.m. in the Administrator's Conference Room, Administration Center, 1300 Courthouse Road.

II. Roll Call.

The following members were present: Jackie Hontz, Alicia Knight, Tom Gregory, Terry Lottes and Danielle Davis. Also present were Marie Schuler of Comcast Communications, Matt Drewery with Cox Communications, and Cathy Riddle and Michele Lansford representing the County.

III. Presentations by the Public.

Mr. Marty Lemus, 206 Revell Road, asked the committee to explore the possibility of providing cable service to his neighborhood (Potomac Run subdivision east of I95, off of Eskimo Hill Rd, comprised of 50 homes on three-acre lots). Mr. Drewery said a swamp prevents Cox from running fiber to those homes. Ms. Schuler said she would be meeting with Comcast's Stafford engineer on January 26, and would ask him to determine if they can provide service. Ms. Schuler will call Mr. Lemus with the results of their discussion.

IV. Agenda Additions.

Ms. Riddle asked Ms. Schuler if Comcast had been able to get Channel 16 (educational channel) back on the air in order to broadcast School Board meetings. Ms. Schuler said a piece of equipment had broken, and a replacement had been ordered. She will keep Ms. Riddle updated.

V. New Business.

Ms. Riddle passed out information from surrounding localities (attached to these minutes) about how they handle cable and other telecommunications issues. The information will assist

the committee in its efforts to become a telecommunications commission to advise the Board of Supervisors on a wide range of telecommunications topics.

Ms. Hontz said the by-laws should be expanded to address Internet and other similar telecommunications matters, especially broadband services.

Ms. Schuler explained that Loudoun County's telecommunications commission deals with cable and open band video service providers, which are similar to cable companies and are required to negotiate franchises with localities. She said Loudoun's commission makes recommendations about WiFi, hot spots, cell towers and other wireless services.

Ms. Riddle recommended committee members hold a conference call with Brian Grogan during the February meeting to talk about the responsibilities a commission would have. She also said staff from the Department of Information Technology might have to become involved once wireless issues were considered.

Mr. Lottes reminded members that local governments do not have authority to regulate Internet or telephone service.

Ms. Davis said they could follow rulings and new regulations by the Federal Communications and report to the Board of Supervisors.

Ms. Hontz asked if anyone could brief the committee about the latest FCC ruling affecting local cable television franchises. Ms. Schuler said Brian Grogan would have the latest information about that. She said the ruling does impact how telephone companies are allowed to offer cable services, and that it does away with a lot of local authority. She said lawsuits against the ruling are pending.

ELECTION OF 2007 OFFICERS

Ms. Hontz opened the floor for nominations for chair. Mr. Gregory nominated himself, and Ms. Knight nominated Ms. Hontz. With the exception of Mr. Gregory, everyone voted for Ms. Hontz, who will serve as chair in 2007.

Ms. Hontz opened the floor for nominations for vice chair. Mr. Lottes nominated Mr. Gregory; Ms. Knight nominated Mr. Lottes. With the exception of Ms. Knight, everyone voted for Mr. Gregory. Mr. Gregory will serve as vice chairman in 2007.

VI. Approval of Minutes.

The minutes of the October 26, 2006, meeting were approved unanimously by acclamation.

VII. Members' Concerns.

Ms. Davis reported a problem in the Aquia District with spotty Internet connections and slow downloads. Ms. Schuler said that Comcast had moved its platform from Adelphia to Comcast in early January, and the service should have been much improved. Ms. Knight said it has gotten worse.

When Ms. Schuler asked how large an area the problem affected, neither member was sure. Ms. Schuler said she will try to determine the cause of the problem and report her findings to the committee.

Ms. Knight said she had heard from constituents who did not know that their e-mail accounts were being migrated from Adelphia to Comcast, and that they are losing e-mails.

Ms. Schuler said every customer was notified about the change by both e-mail and letter. She said she thought that any transition problems had been solved, and that she has not received many complaints. Ms. Knight responded that no date for the change was provided, and no instructions were provided. She said disconnects are common, and e-mail downloads are irregular. She did want to report, however, that Comcast technicians in Stafford say they are pleased about the funds Comcast is investing in infrastructure and to increase local staffing.

Ms. Knight also said that on the video side, when movies are advertised as on-demand, they aren't available. She asked when that would improve. Ms. Schuler said she's aware of the on-demand problem, and it will improve when Comcast makes the final transition and offer 4,000 titles.

Mr. Gregory said his constituents seemed to handle the e-mail transition without problems – he received a notice in the mail about the switch. He said customers have to follow through and find out what to do if they are unclear. He reported that he has also talked to Comcast technicians who are impressed with the company's attempt to improve the system and service. He said the picture quality on the analog side is still very poor.

Ms. Schuler said Comcast has earmarked between \$5 million and \$6 million to improve the existing Stafford plant and for new construction, and that they are trying to catch for the years during which Adelphia made no improvements. She said their customers are letting them know about problems, and they are addressing them as quickly as possible.

Mr. Gregory reported that a pole carrying cable wires along Shelton Shop Road had been knocked down and poorly repaired – there is leakage at that point. He also said those lines need more distribution power. He said that a stretch of homes on Tacketts Mill Road is still without cable service – one section of the homes are served by the Stafford plant, then there is a gap, and the remaining homes to the Fauquier County line are served by the plant in that county. He asked Ms. Schuler if the un-served homes could get cable without having to pay additional money.

Ms. Davis referenced her e-mail to Ms. Schuler about 14 homes on Windermere Dr. that are without cable service, and asked Ms. Schuler to determine if it can be provided. Ms. Davis asked Ms. Schuler if she would call Mr. Walsky, 241 Windermere Drive, who was quoted a price of \$250,000 to have fiber run to his residents – Ms. Schuler said she would. Ms. Schuler said she

has pinpointed this area up on a map, and the cable plant into which Comcast would have to tap is located some distance from these homes. She said she'd talk to the Stafford construction manager about what could be done.

Ms. Davis said she had noticed an improvement in Comcast's customer service – that the telephone representatives are extremely professional, especially in the Huntsville, Ala. call center.

Ms. Hontz asked Ms. Schuler to provide a report detailing capital improvements that have already been made, and future plans. Ms. Schuler said she would provide one. Ms. Hontz also said she heard from a resident who does not want to change his e-mail address, and asked if that were possible – Ms. Schuler replied that it would have to be changed.

Ms. Knight said she had tried to keep her old e-mail address, but was told she could not.

Ms. Davis said residents are not aware that there is a Cable Committee, and asked Ms. Riddle to generate SCALA slides for the government channels with details about the group. Ms. Riddle said that she would.

VIII. Adjournment.

At 8:10 p.m., Mr. Lottes moved to adjourn the meeting; Ms. Davis seconded; the motion passed unanimously.